

Adam Zack

From: Emily Tidball <ewtidball@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 15, 2021 4:58 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Cc: Hosting on the Rock
Subject: Regarding VR CAPs
Attachments: September 17 2021 letter to planning commission.pdf

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Dear Planning Commission Members,

Please read and consider the attached comments regarding the proposed cap on vacation rental permits.

With best regards,
Emily Tidball

September 17, 2021

Members of the San Juan County Planning Commission
PO Box 947 Friday Harbor, WA 98250

Re: Proposed Use of “Caps” for Regulation of Vacation Rentals in San Juan County

Dear Members of the San Juan County Planning Commission,

I urge you to vote no on the recommendation of an ordinance to the San Juan County Council implementing both a county cap and island-by-island cap on the issuance of new permits for vacation rentals. The proposed number of caps at 405 is extreme and arbitrary.

Caps will likely do very little to free up an inventory of affordable housing, protect our environment, slow the movement of tourists or permanent residents to our islands, nor steady the rise in real estate prices afflicting our entire nation. Further, can the Commission quantify the term “overtourism”-what does this mean, and how does it impact the economy, environment and local residents. Can the commission quantify how “overtourism” is attributed to vacation rentals specifically and not to other forms of lodging such as resorts and campgrounds? Targeting vacation rentals seems arbitrary and capricious when tourists come to Orcas and stay in many different types of lodging.

I have not seen carefully gathered data to support the proposed cap on vacation rentals. This data should include the number of violations issued annually, and identification of repeat offenders. Further analysis should be done to determine how many current vacation rental properties fit the category of affordable housing, and if property owners of qualifying homes had an interest in having their property in long term rental.

A recent survey done by the vacation rental advocacy group Hosting on the Rock showed that many properties would be left empty other than when owners, their families or friends were using them. This conclusion is obvious when you consider that many island owners are using their properties as second homes such that long term rental would prohibit owners from occasional use consistent with a second home. Therefore, reducing permits is unlikely to free up second homes to be long term rentals.

Better monitoring of compliance with vacation rental permits, enforcement of rules and regulations, and working with non compliant and repeat offenders could do much more to improve the vacation rental industry than withholding permits.

My property provides income to my very competent local property manager, local gardener, housekeepers, and brings to local businesses. When we were remodeling our home in 2017 we employed several local contractors, bought supplies at ACE and Island Hardware and used local trucking services for delivery of supplies. We pay hospitality taxes which contribute to the county budget. Decreasing income for many island residents and businesses by limiting vacation rental properties should not be done in haste and without adequate consideration.

Additionally, I believe you are heading down a path that will generate litigation given precedent in other communities such as Austin, Texas. What I have observed this year appears to be a

knee jerk reaction not supported by facts and data given the increased traffic to the island during the pandemic. Obviously I support thoughtful tourism, living wage jobs for locals and affordable housing, but I do not think limiting the property rights of one group of regulation-following property owners is a fair manner in which to proceed.

Please take time to gather data to support your conclusions, provide resources to assist with vacation rental permit compliance, consider a reasonable annual fee for filing the compliance document to help with compliance monitoring, and provide data to indicate where the vacation rental industry is culpable for causing neighborhood disturbance and reducing affordable housing options for local permanent residents.

Many of us who own and operate vacation rentals are simply trying to cover costs of home ownership of a second home. Property rights should not be compromised based on hunches and feelings of a minority-proceed once the facts have been gathered.

The economy of the islands are driven by tourism, as is the case for many similar vacation destination communities. This pandemic year has definitely been unique with more people choosing to take vacations on the islands, work remotely, or hasten relocation plans, so care should be taken before making sweeping changes based on an unusual year. We should be crafting thoughtful regulations balancing the needs of the local economy with the tourism industry. Please take time to better research the situation, gather and analyze data and not submit to pressure from a vocal group of residents.

Finally, I speak from the position of being a fourth generation owner of island property. My great grandparents purchased property in Olga which more than 100 years later is still owned by my two siblings. My grandfather's wholesale hardware business in Bellingham, Morse Hardware, supplied all the hardware for Mr. Moran when he built his mansion. My parents, and later my siblings and I owned the building which housed the Olga Post Office, which for many years operated at a significant loss. I am invested in Orcas after coming for my whole life of 61 years.

Please complete the due diligence required to analyze this complex problem, looking to other similar communities, researching our local vacation rental industry and providing clear definitions of the problem prior to jumping into stringent regulations.

With best regards,

Emily Tidball

Tidball Enterprises, LLC (a family owned LLC for our property at 39 Fossil Bay Drive in Eastsound to provide liability protection)